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For ease of presentation, advanced grammar teaching techniques are briefly considered under the headings of structuralism (belief in the effectiveness of presenting grammar rules) and contextualism (belief in the maximum use by students of what they know in the target language). The structuralist's problem of establishing a syllabus is discussed with regard to grammar exercises, structure drills, structure exploration, student essays on grammar, and lectures. The contextualist's search for flexibility and self-confidence in language use is discussed in terms of audiovisual techniques, translation, essay or free composition, summary or abstract writing, lecture expliquee, extensive reading, listening, and debate activities. (AF)

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Educational Institutions and Professional and Industrial Organisations are invited to send details of conferences, courses, seminars that may be of interest to our readers.

Techniques in Advanced Language Teaching

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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The language teaching world is in a ferment of new ideas, techniques and gimmicks, and the debates over methods, over the application of new discoveries and theories (and old ideas rediscovered) to the practical teaching situation; and over the advisability of change, are likely to continue for some time. There have been many contributions to the debates concerning methods in advanced language teaching, and it may be of interest to summarize some of the techniques that are available to teaching in this sphere, and to foresee some of the difficulties.

The basic split between debaters at this level is between those who propose to teach and those who consider that it is impossible to teach, that one can merely encourage students to absorb the diet which is put before them. The former group are those who believe basically in the effectiveness of grammar rules whether for use by the students or by themselves in the preparation of their teaching material; the latter believe in the advisability of a maximum of use by students of what they know, in the effectiveness of a wider and wider acquaintance with the actual use of the foreign language in a number of contexts; one could say, borrowing the words from another area, that the debate lies between the structuralists and the contextualists, rather than between conservatives and progressives, ancients and moderns, them and us. There are gradations, there are those who combine the two attitudes, who see the two sides as complementary; from the point of view of this article it may be easier to classify the available techniques in the two groups.

STRUCTURALISTS

For those in the first group the essential problem is that of establishing a syllabus. In the elementary stages of learning a language there is no problem; so much has to be taught that what matters is the skill a teacher, or a textbook, shows in selection. In the advanced stages the problem is reversed; very little new material has to be taught, so the question may be one of re-teaching or of reorganising known material. Most workers here analyse the essays, translations etc. of their students over a period of two or three years and decide that the areas in which most mistakes are made are those which need formal teaching[1]; others attempt to revise knowledge of a large proportion of the structures of the language, arranging the material under heading such as Asking Questions, Negatives, the Passive etc.; others again decide to tackle (often subjectively chosen) structures expressing subtle distinctions in language use, calling them "Advanced Grammar". Such works as the syntax frequency list of Clark and Poston for French, based on a similar one for Spanish by Keniston[2], can be very helpful in supporting such work. Other teachers decide that the problem is more one of style than one of pure grammar and so teach Practical Stylistics, whether from the deductive or the inductive point of view — taking a text and encouraging students to identify its stylistic features (a process which has obvious connections with literary studies, with Practical Criticism, with the whole approach underlying the "commentaire de texte", with the school of stylistics associated with Bally[3]; or analysing and exemplifying the possible ways of ringing the changes on a basic text or statement[4] and the devices used in the expression of different aims or in revealing different characteristics[5] of expression. The basic problem for the stylisticians is also that of establishing a syllabus for such material.

For the structuralists the distinctions between teaching at an advanced level, once one has obtained the necessary syllabus and knows what it is one is to teach, and teaching at any other

level are not great; much the same techniques can be used to teach an "advanced" structure as are used to teach an "elementary" one.

Grammar Exercises

The traditional method has been to explain a point of grammar, and follow up this explanation by exercises. The explanation has usually been based on the "psychological" grammar — parts of speech and concepts conveyed — but such an explanation can equally well be carried out by a "formal" analysis of the problem. The usual form of the exercises to follow has been the translation of disconnected sentences or a connected passage, but other techniques have been suggested — making up sentences similar to one which is put forward as the model; answering questions in the foreign language, using the structure under discussion in the answers; filling in gaps in given sentences in the foreign language; changing tenses and otherwise transforming given sentences in the foreign language.

The exercises can be contextually grounded, extracted from a previously studied text (spoken or written), from a previously acted playlet or dialogue, from a previously seen film, etc. Most textbooks for language teaching follow this plan.

Structure drills

As a development from this technique structural drills have been introduced. Usually an exercise on a particular grammar point, structure, or mécanisme will consist of eight to ten sentences of the same type, practising this one point (and therefore not concerned with introducing other difficulties, of comprehension, translation, etc., which merely complicate the problem) in the same way. Usually the structure drills are designed for use in a language laboratory, but may also be used in a classroom or even as written exercises. Many types of structural drill have been evolved[8], ranging from simple exercises of substitution to more complex transformation drills, progressive drills[7], question and answer drills etc. Common to all is the principle that only one structure may be practised at any one time, that any difficulties of meaning have therefore to be removed before practice can take place (and therefore incidentally, that this sort of drill *practises*, it does not *teach*), that utterances must be kept short to avoid memory problems (in a language laboratory context, this means utterances no longer than fifteen syllables or thereabouts). Structure drills are at the moment the backbone of most "audio-visual" or "audio-lingual" courses; two drawbacks to their use in more advanced teaching are the problems inherent in trying to practise complex or juxtaposed sentences and longer utterances generally, without making these either too long or too boring (although one may hope for high motivation and a developed audio memory in advanced students, there is little to be gained from straining these advantages); and the fact that if one is to practise a single problem the drills must be written in such a way as to evoke only one correct response. At an advanced level it is rarely even likely that a stimulus will provoke only one correct response[8] and thus fixed-choice drills may well be of limited use.

Free-choice or open-ended drills in the language laboratory might then be the answer; but the question here may well be asked what point there is in doing these in the language laboratory[9]. They may well be better done outside, in the classroom, where some check can be maintained on the correctness of the free response. This problem is connected with that of monitoring; for there to be any point in monitoring students one must be able to devote time to individuals, so the size of the group must be as small as possible. It seems that eight is probably a maximum for effective work at advanced level.

Structure exploration

Another technique much used at lower levels of language teaching is that of the Question and Answer Battery[10]. A given structure is thoroughly practised by being used in questions and answers based on a minimum of factual information which provides a meaningful context; the oral and intensive battery of questions is designed to practise the structure in use. The active oral method has much to commend it an early stage; at an advanced level its use will require more tact, except with entirely new work.

EJ 000 848 ED 051 20

Grammar essays

Students are asked to give their own talks on a particular grammar point, having previously heard an analysis of usage or having carried out their own research and created their own examples. The talks may be given to a class, to a tape-recorder for subsequent replay, in a language laboratory[11], may be written; may be discussed in class by the group. These talks suffer from the same disadvantage as most "grammar" work — talking about language is not the same thing as using it.

Lectures

Given by the teacher on a particular grammar point or point of usage. A quite widely used method, with or without a follow-up of some nature; everything depends on the lecturer's personality and innate sense of showmanship (as in all lecturing); and the transfer from talking about correct language use to the correct use itself has still to be carried out.

CONTEXTUALISTS

For those in the second group, who believe that the aim of advanced language teaching is flexibility and self-confidence in language use, it seems self-evident that a series of language laboratory drills practising a grammar point without concern for the contextual reality of the language which is being used, without, therefore, any concern for the meaning-content of what is being said and repeated and practised by the student, is as bad a language teaching technique as the disconnected sentences for translation of grandfather's day. For the contextualists the first concern must be to establish a meaningful situation from which all language usage will come and to which all language practice can be referred. It follows that contextualists may believe that structural drills and structure practice are needed and appropriate, if they refer to a context and to each other; on the other hand, the contextualist may well not believe at all in such drills, and may think it better to teach by exemplification, extensive reading and numerous exercises such as translation which allow wide contacts with the foreign language. Many techniques exist apart from translation for the creation of such exercises — which are perhaps better not thought of as exercises, but as contexts in which language can be experienced.

Audio-Visual techniques

By the use of diagrams, cartoons, film sequences etc. a context may be created in which a certain use of language is both appropriate and natural. Ideally, of course, the student should learn his language usage in the same way he did with his own native language — in the situations in which it would be natural for a native speaker to use certain forms and structures, the student should hear the native speaker actually using them. An approximation to this ideal is to see native speakers in a "play" situation — a playlet, going to work, using the telephone etc., in short sketches, or in longer dialogue situations. For pedagogic reasons one needs to be able to repeat the situation exactly as it was before, and it is here that the techniques loosely called "audio-visual" come into their own. Ciné-loops which repeat a situation ad infinitum, and shown in projectors which allow the teacher to "hold" one frame if necessary, are the clearest example of this "repeat" technique[12]. Ordinary silent or sound films[13], specially created to teach particular structures in particular languages, or (and these are probably even more effective) produced as straight entertainment, are the nearest we can get to the "real-life" situation. Film-strips, slides, wall-charts, drawings, "flash-cards", realia of one kind or another — even the blackboard — have their uses in creating situations in which referential meaning can support, underline or clarify language usage. At the more elementary levels of language teaching an enormous range of material has been developed, ranging from the flannelgraph to the use of puppets. Such techniques have been little used for advanced teaching, if only because many of the structures one wishes to teach are used in fairly rare situations, which it would probably be inefficient to create. Other techniques have therefore been more widely used to provide the contexts for teaching at this level. Nonetheless, the "entertainment" film is probably one of the most useful aids for teaching.

Translation

The backbone of advanced teaching method

for many years; under fire recently[14] as being principally a method of testing what students already know rather than of teaching them anything new. Another trouble, from the point of view of providing a suitable context for language teaching, is that a translation passage will provide a context which reflects essentially a situation unique to the language in which it is expressed; putting this situation into another language can only mean interpreting the target language in terms of the source language. In elementary translation and in translating for example scientific jargon this may not always matter much; the difference between an English "chair" and a French "chaise", although real, is not such at to call forth a lengthy footnote or to cause doubt; but the difference between "le péché" and "sin" is the whole difference between English and French civilisation; the difference between "laïque" and whatever English word or words one may suggest for its translation reflects again this difference of cultures[15]. All translation is impossible; one can merely reflect one civilisation in terms of the nearest equivalents in another — and this must mean that for language-teaching purposes one is merely reinforcing the students' knowledge of the source-language's civilisation, not widening that of the target language. The more precise one becomes, the more interested in conveying the nuances of the original, the more one is tied by this original and the less the translation will look and sound like original work in the target language (and if it does not look and sound like original work, what is the point of it?). On the other hand, if the translation is to be free and not limited to an exact transfer of what is in the original, the point of the operation is difficult to see — one might as well "translate" *inside* the language — recreate a passage with a different aim, redescribe a scene from another person's point of view, change a dialogue to a narration. The traditional "Prose Composition" fails principally, though, not on the theoretical level but on the practical ones that the method involves dictionary and reference grammar — dangerous weapons in any student's hands, unless he is prepared not just to use Harrap's Volume Two, but also Larousse and Robert — and even then the actual use in context of the word or expression he seeks may not be given; and also on the ground that the effort involved in discovering the student's own version is likely to reinforce any errors. From this standpoint it seems best to change the traditional technique and to discuss the possible alternatives, nuances, etc., before the translation is written rather than afterwards — otherwise the process is a mere testing of student's ability in hunting, rather than a real teaching or learning process.

Essay or Free Composition

The student is not now restricted by the precise dictates of a passage to be translated, but is free to express himself from "inside" the language. The context is provided by the essay title and by the ideas which are associated, and which come either from the student's own appreciation of the subject, or from preparatory work of some nature — an extract from a newspaper on the same topic, a discussion, an examination of passages on a similar topic or in a similar style. To a certain extent, free composition and essay-writing suffer from similar drawbacks to those we have discussed with Prose Composition — essentially there is an element of testing involved, since the student applies what he already knows to the context he finds himself in. The teaching process must also therefore precede the production stage, and will involve preparatory work on ideas and subject matter as much as on expressions, vocabulary, idioms etc. As variations at the production stage, one can set oral essays, oral or written reports of a meeting or discussion, "exposés" on a prepared theme. The preparation or teaching stage may involve private research or reading, listening to pre-recorded tapes, containing, for example, a passage on the topic followed by a discussion on the same subject, and followed by a recapitulation of the main points, idioms, words etc. being pointed out; it may involve classwork in studying passages or a text on the subject. An essay as a testing technique tests far more than mere language knowledge; it also reveals qualities of organisation, of memory, of original thought, of intelligence, of personality; sufficient reason to doubt their value for assessing a student's language knowledge.

Summary/abstract writing

The précis of "O" level English examinations, much admired by the non-English as a teaching technique (particularly for teaching organisation, analysis, logical thought), also has its uses for teaching language in that the context is precise and allows exemplification of new constructions and words which have to be fully understood before one can see whether they are essential to the précis one is to make. A flexible technique, also, in that the précis can be of any required length (and therefore the density of information in the final version can be regulated).

Lecture expliquée

The intensive examination of texts, commentary on word forms and usage, mention of synonyms, opposites, homonyms, discussion of *le fond* in terms of *la forme*; an ideal teaching method, being so free and yet so context-bound, for language-teaching. The dangers are that the lecturer will talk too much (it should be a discussion, or prepared and given by the student), that the "fond" will become of more importance than the "forme" (great care is necessary in choosing the passages to ensure that they are not too literary (beware the French purple passage) nor too technical (in which case the process can often become merely a gloss on words alone); the advantages are that the lecturer has close control over the development of language knowledge, that he can cover a very wide area of new ground and yet "attach" this material to a definite context, and that his discussion can be as detailed or as vague as he wishes or as is needed by the students.

Extensive reading

The method by which most students teach themselves—the teacher can perhaps assist the process by setting progressively more difficult texts, by ensuring that students do read them, and by ensuring that students profit by their reading (vocabulary/grammar notebooks, tests, summaries, tutorials). To extensive reading corresponds also what one might call extensive contact with the spoken language — visits to France, going to French films, living in a French family, the French circle — the non-teaching situations which may often teach a great deal.

Listening

An extension of the preceding, and one of the most valuable teaching/learning techniques involving language laboratories at this level. Listening to plays, poetry, books, lectures; to recorded interviews, to songs, to news bulletins. In order to ensure that the material is being listened to with care one can request students to transcribe what they hear (=dictation) or to write reports on what they hear. Lectures in the foreign language may be on topics associated with the academic course (literature, regional studies, linguistics, the speciality associated with language in a combined course) or on more general subjects.

Debates/discussions

Particularly for courses in which the oral element is stressed, it seems useful to situate some language usage in the argumentative context of a discussion. These need preparation, as does the essay, not only with the language to be used in mind, but also from the point of view of the subject matter, the ideas, to be presented and discussed. Debates and discussions also need a written follow-up if they are not to seem somewhat aimless and wandering to the students — a report or essay are often used for this. It is possible also to tape-record the whole debate to avoid the necessity of correcting students while they are in full flow; the tape can be listened to later on with the same group, who can be asked to point out each other's errors; the "autocritique" technique has some advantages in the teaching/learning situation.

CONCLUSIONS

The techniques available to teachers in the sphere of advanced language learning are numerous. They have, somewhat falsely, been divided in this brief summary, and separated from each other. It is obvious that such separation does not exist in the practical language teaching situation; it is also obvious that any and all techniques have their advantages and disadvantages, and one's eventual choice must be conditioned by several factors. But the

overriding factor must be the efficacity of the particular technique; the question is not whether this particular technique works or not — students, or the good ones, will learn a certain amount whatever techniques are used — but whether there is a better or more efficient technique which will teach more quickly or more thoroughly. In this respect, and in teaching at this level, it still seems likely that translation will be a relatively inefficient technique, but one that is easier to prepare than any possible replacement; that analytical techniques must be counterbalanced by active use of the language; that structure drills are likely to be of relatively small use; that audio-visual techniques will either be unsystematic attempts to illustrate wide areas of language usage, or, if systematic, will need a great deal of preparation and adaptation to the particular needs of the group. But in the final analysis, what matters in the language learning situation is *motivation;* the lecturer's personality must be capable of inspiring students. With the worst grammar grind and translation techniques, with the worst materials, with a shocking accent, a good teacher is still able to produce good results; with better and more efficient techniques, the results ought to be outstanding. But in the advanced stages of language learning, the lecturer's task is mainly one of offering opportunities for language learning, of supplying the materials so that the students can get on with the job.

Notes

1 Such analyses are often of limited value to institutions other than those in which they are made. If the analysis is carried out on the basis of translation work, the results will show a heavy preponderance of interference errors, which may not necessarily reflect the actual knowledge of the students.

2 Clarke, R. E. & Poston, L.; French Syntax List. *H. Holt & Co., New York, 1943*
See also — E. Halsall: A syntax frequency list *in Modern Languages XLVII September 1966, No. 3, pp 107-111*

3 Ch. Bally: *Traité de stylistique française-Klincksieck 1909, 3rd edition 1953*

4 cf R. Queneau: Exercices de style

5 cf J. Marouzeau: Précis de stylistique française — Masson
cf. A. Sauvageot: Les procédés expressifs du français contemporain

6 classified and described in
Stack: The language laboratory. *OUP*
F. Marty: Language laboratory learning
P. Réquédat: Exercices structureaux — *B.E.L. 1966*

7 as used in eg A. Valdman & S. Belasco: Applied Linguistics — *French Heath/Harrap*

8 cf W. van der Will: The language laboratory in advanced language teaching *in Modern Languages XLVII No. 2, June 1966, p 57*

9 cf P. Newmark: What language laboratories can do *in The Incorporated Linguist, April 1966; Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 42-48*

10 cf F. M. Hodgson: Learning Modern Languages — *Routledge & Kegan Paul. 1955*

11 see Note 8

12 cf the series by G. Fleming published *by Macmillan*

13 cf the lists published in *"Visual Education"*

14 cf W. B. Lockwood *in Modern Languages XXXVI, No. 3*
and R. Hinton Thomas *in Modern Languages XLIV, No. 2*

15 see further the introduction to M. Blanc: Visages de la France Contemporaine — *Harrap*

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